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# The Condor

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## Birds of the Little Sur River, Monterey County.

BY JOSEPH GRINNELL.

THE three days from July 11 to 13 last summer I spent in a trip down the coast from Monterey to the Little Sur River some twenty-five miles south. A party of us from the Hopkins Laboratory including Dr. O. P. Jenkins and several members of the class in ornithology set out on our wheels early Friday morning. In spite of the rough roads and almost continuous series of steep hills we thoroughly enjoyed the picturesque scenery which presented points of new interest at nearly every turn. The road follows the hillsides facing the rugged coastline and crosses many ravines which cut down transversely to the ocean. The Monterey pines which make up the forest on the Monterey peninsula cease entirely within a couple of miles below Point Lobos, and then comes a stretch of perhaps fifteen miles without a native tree of any sort until the mouth of Mill creek is reached. Here the first redwoods were met with, and those most exposed to the prevailing strong sea-breezes presented a curious flattened-down appearance. Behind the brow of a hill the tree tops were abruptly lopped off level with the top of the sheltering ridge, those right at the crest being only a few feet in height, but with broadly branching fol-

iage. The road winds up over two divides before finally zigzagging down into the deep valley of the Little Sur. Here, toward the mouth, are several farms, and on the south fork where the dense redwood timber begins is a summer camp or "hotel" called Idlewild. This we made our headquarters for the two nights of our stay. The crest of the Santa Lucia mountains which parallel the coast is here fully 3500 feet high, though scarcely ten miles inland from the sea-board. Yet the short canyons which cut westward down this rainy and foggy Pacific shed carry even in summer considerable streams. This narrow coastal slope is in continuation with California's "humid coast belt," and the Little Sur marks nearly its extreme southern limit. At least the redwoods so characteristic of this belt do not extend as far south as San Simeon, fifty miles below; the intermediate country seems to be almost a terra incognita.

Upon gazing over the Mill Creek divide into Little Sur Valley, we felt well repaid for our last dusty climb. For below us the dense dark forest looked invitingly cool and the murmur of mountain brooks came filtering up from the shady depths. To the right, between the hills guarding the mouth of the valley, shimmered the placid

ocean; while to the left the dark wooded bottom forked and tongues of forest extended up the branching canyons between brown bare ridges until they dwindled out toward the higher flanks of the lofty mountain. The effect on the forest of slope exposure and moisture was here beautifully illustrated, for the northeast slopes were clothed in places nearly to the top of the ridges, while the hot southwest slopes were usually treeless save for occasional scrub oaks and stretches of low brush. An examination of the avifauna clearly showed two distinct phases of bird population corresponding to these two temperature belts. The upper ridges and open hillsides under the glare of the sun and with their thin clothing of smaller vegetation formed a congenial home for many birds familiar in the warm interior parts of California. Here we found such Upper Sonoran species as *Toxostoma redivivum*, *Pipilo crissalis*, *Chamaea fasciata intermedia*, *Geococcyx californianus*, *Phalænoptilus nuttalli californicus*, *Lophortyx californicus*, and *Aphelocoma californica*. But down in the deep canyons everything was different. The cool, damp air currents penetrate up the valley from the ocean and diverge up each branch and canyon. One could almost trace the shores of this air-stream in its ascending flow by the limits of the redwoods. These immense trees on the South Fork formed a dense forest, so shaded that there was little underbrush except where it thinned out up the canyon sides and where felled for shingles. Near the upper timber limit where it was warmer and less humid, many Douglas spruces were to be seen, with tan-bark oaks, madrones and bay trees. It struck us as unusual, at least in our experience, to find a "high" zone below a lower one. But here the direct effect of the ocean more than offsets altitudinal decrease in temperature and evidently accounts for the Transition with many Boreal elements being at the low-

est level. In the thickest redwoods, birds were scarce, but what there were reminded us strongly of regions far to the northward. In the tangles of fallen trees and salmon-berry bushes we found the diminutive winter wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis pacificus*). The rasping call note and occasional song to us sounded like the squeaky noise of the brakes of a wagon on a down grade. Newly fledged young were taken, proving this to be the southernmost breeding station of the species anywhere in the United States. Creepers (*Certhia americanus occidentalis*) were about equal to the wrens in point of numbers, but were to be seen only high up on the tree trunks, usually far above dust-shot range. Their attenuated notes were continually heard in favorable places. But the birds themselves were difficult to discern, for they were like as not to be on the opposite side of a tree, and the ventriloquous quality of their notes made their discovery still more uncertain. A brood of bob-tailed young were seen awkwardly clambering about a tree trunk following their anxious parents. Another bird confined to the deepest parts of the woods was the Monterey hermit thrush, a bird which we found more elusive the more we sought after it. At first we were content with listening to its song which now and then swelled into a full melodious strain only to die away in a far-off tinkle. Such a song has to be *felt* to be appreciated, for it seems to exert a hypnotic influence, inducing in one a sort of melancholy reverie. But we warded off the spell, remembering that here was the type locality of *Hylocichla guttata slevini*. With this thought came the vision of a series of symmetrical skins lined up in the presence of the A. O. U. Committee to prove the existence of a nameable race. We forgot the sentiment inspired by that wonderful song, and used it only as a clue for the undoing of its author. But it proved a will-o'-the-wisp, for our stealthy scouting availed

nothing. The song still resounded just beyond the next screen of foliage, and even our most seductive "squeaking" failed to lure the distrustful thrush. And then we fell under the spell of that song again and felt a sense of relief that we had not shot any thrushes. We even questioned whether the Committee could make any ruling that would really affect that song, or the color or the wing-length of the bird. So we wandered off and shot harsh-voiced jays to make a "series" less hurtful to our soft consciences.

The coast jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri carbonacea*) were fairly numerous though keeping down in the canyons, where they were most noticeable about clearings. Two other birds of the Santa Cruz isohumic area were also here, but only sparingly represented. These were the Point Pinos junco (*Junco pinosus*) and the Santa Cruz chickadee (*Parus barlowi*). Along the upper edges of the redwood tracts, among the tan-bark oaks, lutescent warblers (*Helminthophila celata lutescens*), pine siskins (*Spinus pinus*), and California purple finches (*Carpodacus purpureus californicus*) were common. About some tall dead trees western martins (*Progne subis hesperia*) and violet-green swallows (*Tachycineta lepida*) were flying. A single olive-sided fly-catcher (*Contopus borealis*) from a lofty perch uttered its two-syllabled call; while far overhead circled a pair of golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*.)

We thought ourselves fortunate in meeting with several owls, those elusive birds of twilight. Pacific horned owls (*Bubo virginianus pacificus*) were frequently started from their day time roosts in shady groves. The one shot gave evidence of a truly reprehensible trait, for under its perch was a headless screech owl (*Megascops asio bendirei*) and a young one at that. Owl-eating owls have been reported before, but we will hope that the habit is not general. Following up a trail leading from the

woods to an open stretch of pasture land above, one of our party discovered a family of pygmy owls (*Glaucidium gnoma californicum*). There were at least three young besides the parents, all perched in a madrone, though not all seen until they took flight. An adult was shot and the rest scattered, flying swiftly off into the shady depths of the redwood foliage below. We supposed them lost to us altogether, until upon returning some hours later, we heard near the same spot a strange cry, a sort of shrill whinnying call. We stopped in silence for some minutes, peering about through the trees, until the note was repeated and shortly answered. Finally a little owl was located perched motionless on a horizontal redwood twig, in plain sight after one knew where to look for it. This proved to be a nearly-fledged young, and the note we had traced was evidently the juvenile food call of this species, which is known to be more or less diurnal in its habits.

Besides the birds I have mentioned, many others were seen in the Little Sur country, but those above named were the most interesting to us, and best serve to indicate the avifaunal complexion of the two zones of the region. The Sur River Valley looks like a miniature counterpart of the Big Basin in the Santa Cruz mountains, seventy-five miles to the northward.

This interesting region has only been written upon once before in a general way. In the *Osprey*, Volume V, September-October 1900, pages 6-7, occurs an article by Milton S. Ray under the caption of "Idle Hours at Idlewild or Observations in Central Monterey County." This consists of a running account in rather desultory style of the birds seen by the author during two weeks in June in the vicinity of the Little Sur River. Among the forty species mentioned by Ray are eight which our party failed to find. Three or four of these eight are unexpected,

to say the least, and perhaps were entered through misidentification. The statement is made that "near the mouth (of the river), where a sage-brush canyon extends to the river bottom, Sage Thrashers (*Oroscoptes montanus*) were abundant, and in the low scrubby willows were the nests made of twigs and lined with rootlets." Ray does not mention the California thrasher which is abundant in the brushy parts of the same region. Further he states that "at the head of these arid canyons the merry little Canyon Wren (*Catherpes mexicanus conspersus*) shares its lonely

habitat with the rattlesnake." (!) The rock wren does not receive mention and is a species characteristic of such localities as described. The student of distribution would possibly feel more at ease if the specimen of "*Ammodramus savannarum perpallidus*" were also re-identified. Extreme care in identification of species and subspecies is becoming more and more requisite, as the study of chorology advances. A few false stations are liable to confuse the student and cause erroneous deductions, as has been already emphasized elsewhere.

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### The Holbœll Grebe in Montana.

BY P. M. SOLLOWAY.

**S**WAN LAKE, the center of my activities during the oological season of 1902, lies nearly east of the head of Flathead Lake, and properly comes within the Flathead Lake region. It is separated from the larger lake by the northern end of the Mission range, and as Flathead Lake follows the base of the western slopes of the Mission Mountains, so Swan Lake lies along their eastern slopes. For about twelve miles Swan Lake parallels the larger lake, both being in sight from the crests of the intervening heights. The lake is apparently the result of glacial action, whereby a slightly sinuous furrow averaging at least a half mile wide was worn in the depression between the Mission and Swan ranges, leaving a typical mountain lake, through which Swan River glides on its way to Flathead Lake. The foot of Swan Lake is about eight miles from the University of Montana Biological Station, from which I had previously made collecting trips to the lake. Heretofore, however, the head of Swan Lake had been an enchanted region quite un-

known to the "bug-house" people, and I had long looked forward to the opportunity of the present season.

At its head the lake spreads out into a nearly circular area at least two miles in diameter, beyond which lay a submerged region of a square mile or more, overgrown thickly with old reeds and similar water weeds, the haunt of innumerable water-fowl, as I had been informed by the veracious natives. Here was a scene for a naturalist, the surroundings being rugged, pine-clad or fire-swept mountains, whose shoulders bore the accumulations of the snows of centuries. This was the forest primeval, the heart of the Lewis and Clarke forest reserve, an area including 4,572 square miles. It is needless to say that the familiar signs, "Keep out," and "No hunting with dogs or guns," are not to be seen at the place I had selected for my summer's operations.

My headquarters was the cabin of Mr. Ernest Bond, the forest-ranger who has charge of the immediate district. Among the various wildwood decorations of his cabin, one of the first that